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Protocol of Calls From Distant Space

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WASHINGTON, June 7 — An encounter with Allan E. Goodman can be unsettling.

He's plainly serious: a scholar of international negotiations, a dean at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, a former analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency. He's a critic of too much Government secrecy. He's 40 years old, he dresses neatly (running shoes, khakis, lightly starched shirt) and he seems worldly and reasonable.

But now he sits down on his office couch, unfolds a chart of the universe with the faintest rustle of excitement and points out various stars that are only five or 10 light years from Earth. He says Earthlings could eventually have a leisurely radio chat with any intelligent beings out there.

Send in the Diplomats

All this, moreover, is just the scientific prelude to Dr. Goodman's real interests, which are foreign policy, intelligence and negotiations.

He wonders: What might the political and diplomatic implications be of a first contact with intelligent beings from outer space? Should not Earthlings be thinking of how they might respond and perhaps planning their reply? And when scientists beam messages into distant space, as they sometimes do, whom should they speak for? Themselves? The United States? Some other nation? Human-kind?

Dr. Goodman thinks the world needs an international code of conduct to cover such questions. He thinks messages from Earth should be just that. He is worried that national governments may make grave errors in dealing with alien messages and particularly that they might keep such contacts a secret.

A Possibility to Consider

Dr. Goldman does not assume, he said the other day in Georgetown's elegant new Intercultural Center, that intelligent beings are out there. He only assumes they might be, as many astronomers do, and that their radio signals may soon reach Earth or be sensed and unscrambled by new technologies.

There are 15 scientific projects now under way in the United States, the Soviet Union and Europe that are searching for signs of extraterrestrial intelligence. These projects' scientific eyes and ears get more sensitive

every year. In fact, Dr. Goodman noted, the director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, James M. Beggs, told a Georgetown seminar last October that he thought extraterrestrials would be heard from by the end of the century.

The possibility raises questions on several levels. For example: "I don't think there's any guarantee that ET will communicate with any of the projects searching for it," Dr. Goodman said. "What I think we're going to get is not, 'Hello, Earth, it's 2,000 degrees Celsius up here.' What we're going to get is some kind of code." And the best American codebreakers around, the former intelligence analyst pointed out, are at the National Security Agency, the Government's center of electronic eavesdropping.

Message From Dying Planet?

"Would they reveal this information?" Dr. Goodman asked. Maybe not. Perhaps the Government would rather not let the Soviet Union know that the United States could distinguish and decode such difficult messages. And what if ET's message proved to be extraordinarily valuable? It might be a galactic encyclopedia of scientific, medical and other knowledge, the collected wisdom of another civilization, the kind of gift a dying planet might broadcast in a last dramatic act of warning and generosity, Dr. Goodman said calmly. A government might not want to share such a find.

"I think this discovery, if it is ever made," Dr. Goodman said, referring to any message from space, any unmistakable sign that human beings have intelligent company in the universe, "should be public from start to finish. And whatever we learn, whatever we communicate, should be done on behalf of the Earth."

In 1974 a group of American scien-

tists beamed a message describing Homo sapiens up toward M13, a globular cluster of more than 100,000 stars in the constellation Hercules, 35,000 light years away. This transmission was "a great mistake," in Dr. Goodman's view. In fact, it followed the signing of an agreement between several of the scientists and their Soviet counterparts that they would all consult before any such message was sent. The agreement was ignored.

The Cosmic Jungle Theorists

The 1974 transmission raised another question as well. "Some of the scientists," Dr. Goodman said, "opposed sending the message on the argument that you don't want to reveal your location in the jungle."

Dr. Goodman is of two minds about the Cosmic Jungle theory. Basically he takes a pluckier, more progressive view and thinks we should make our presence known. But he worries if we should not be extremely cautious. After all, the history of intercultural contacts on Earth has known some awful passages.